

Testimony of Nancy O'Malley

The mission of an Office of Victim Services is to promote partnerships among victim service providers to achieve a safe state and safe communities by supporting victims and communities and ensuring their rights under the law. Implicit in an Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security is perpetrator accountability without sacrificing the safety, the needs or the services provided to the victims of crimes.

California has one of the oldest comprehensive and progressive victim services systems in the United States. In 1973, the Nation's first Rape Crisis Center (BAWAR) and the first Victim-Witness Assistance Center (Alameda County District Attorney) were formed in California. Today, there are 84 Rape Crisis Centers, 120 Battered Women's agencies and 58 Victim-Witness Assistance Centers in California. Additionally, there are four Statewide Coalitions, CALCASA, CAADV, SCCBW and the Victim-Witness Coordinating Council, all of which receive separate governmental funds. Combined, these centers and agencies provide services (prevention, intervention and response, treatment) to hundreds of thousands of crime victims. Without question, those working in the field of Victim Services are committed professionals making every effort to provide comprehensive services to victims of crime. However, as is pointed out by the California Performance Review, those services and service agencies are

not coordinated or integrated. The person who suffers the most from this lack of coordination and integration of services is the victim. That must be corrected.

California has been very proactive in enacting Victim's Rights legislation which provides a host of protections, assistance, rights and funding. For instance, a victim of sexual assault has the absolute right to have a rape crisis advocate with her at the hospital and law enforcement is mandated to contact the local Rape Crisis Center. A domestic violence victim has the right to have a confidential communication with a domestic violence counselor. A child victim of abuse or a person who has a disability has the right to have a Victim-Witness Advocate in Court at all times for support. But, passing legislation and authorizing funding is simply not enough. We must all strive to have those services be comprehensive and seamless as victims of crime move toward closure and healing, irrespective of whether the perpetrator is ever apprehended and/or prosecuted; irrespective of whether the victim of the crime participates in the criminal justice system; and particularly irrespective of which victim service agency is providing the service.

In order to achieve that goal, the various allied agencies must have a close working relationship and institutional nexus to the other. In creating a Division of Victim Services (DVS) and placing it under the proposed Department of Public Safety and Homeland Security, California will once again be a leader in promoting Victim Services by consolidating agencies and coordinating services. The recommendation is to consolidate victim services, including the Victim

Compensation Program of the Victim Compensation and Government Claims Board, the Battered Women's Shelter Program from the Department of Health Services and the Victim Services Branch of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services. There is a subsequent recommendation to consolidate *some* of the ten secondary victim-related programs, many of which are managed by other state agencies and have different funding sources.

The recommendation is a start, but it falls short of the spirit of the proposed action. All funds provided to any agency for victim services should be consolidated under the Division of Victim Services. All programs that are providing services to victims of crime, irrespective of the status of the criminal justice involvement, should be consolidated under the Division of Victim Services. All programs should be more oriented to closing gaps and providing comprehensive services to victims while working in collaboration with the other. Not only will the comprehensive consolidation promote the unification of victim services but will also promote service providers to work collaboratively with the underlying goal of promoting the seamless delivery of services to victims.

The challenge will be to structure a Division in such a way that the rules and regulations that govern the various service providers and the rules and regulations that direct the funding sources are adhered to. There needs to be sufficient planning and transition time so that the structure is in place to absorb management of all of these agencies and administration of the separate funds.

There needs to be sufficient input from the field so as to have ownership and “buy-in” from those who will be moved to the new agency. Ultimately, the transition must be done in a way that the victim is in no way affected adversely by the consolidation and coordination of agencies providing those services.